

# SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCE ON YOUNG TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

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## Abstract

This research was aimed to identify the influence of socio-environmental factors on track and field athletes of age 13–17 participation in sport. Questionnaire method was used to examine 52 athletes (age 13–17). Interview method was applied to question 11 coaches of track and field athletics.

Analysis of survey data revealed that the most important socio-environmental factor that determined cadets and juniors choice to engage in sport was a possibility to communicate with other athletes and coach (cadets – 60.2%; juniors – 66.7%). Young athletes attended trainings because of intentions to achieve high sport results (100% cadets; 92.6% juniors) and to participate in sport competitions (80.3% cadets; 88.9% juniors). Coaches' interview revealed that choice of track and field athletics and frequency of participating in trainings were influenced by the complexity of socio-environmental factors: authority of the coach (regularity, ability to interest), parents' and friends' recommendations, conditions of trainings. Conclusion. Social factors were of major importance for cadets and juniors in choosing track and field athletics, though self-realization goals were of higher importance for young athletes when participating in sport.

KEYWORDS: socio-environmental factors, young track and field athletes, sport activity.

## Introduction

Track and field athletics is one of the most popular sport disciplines in the world. Athletic exercises are very suitable mean for children and youth universal development and fitness improvement (Stanislovaitis, Poderys, 2008). It influences not only individual's physical abilities but other socially significant moral, ethic, psychic, and communication skills growth as well (Šukys, 2005; Fritz, 2011). Sport activities are great area to develop social skills (Gullotta et al., 2008; Tailor, Welch, Nanney, 2012): youth learn adequately to behave in difficult situations, to fight stress, follow social norms, and develop interpersonal relations.

According to the statistics of Lithuanian track and field athletics competitions, the recent problem is a decreasing number of pupils willing to participate in such events. Scientists from Lithuania (Miškinis, 2006, Žilinskienė, 2009) and foreign countries (Weiss, 2010; Scanlan, Russell, Magyar, 2009) note that the impact may be formed not only by individual abilities, need for self-expression, or age but as well as by socio-environmental factors – parents recommendations and support, friends attitude, coach-and-athlete and athletes interpersonal relationships, etc.

When studying the influence of socio-environmental factors on young track and field athletes' participation in trainings and competitions, it is purposeful to analyse the impact of parents, coaches, and friends. According to N. M. LaVoi, M. B. Stellino (2008), parents are primary and often the main factor for socialization through sport. Father and mother supervise how their child succeeds in trainings and competitions, give a support and encouragement. Authors indicate parents' ability to create suitable motivational microclimate that stimulates self-confidence and attendance of sport trainings. Pedagogues supplement and correct educational influence formed by family. M. Goral (2010) research had revealed that competent physical education teachers and coaches, who invite and engage children into any sport discipline, are very important social factor that stimulates keeping to attend trainings and participating in competitions. J. Liukkonen et al. (2007) state that coaches of high professional competencies can encourage children interest by their erudition and abilities. Psychological climate in trainings and interpersonal relations also have significant influence on universal athletes' growth (Felton, Jowett, 2012). Only fluent mutual – coach and athlete – work helps in achieving great sport results (Karoblis, 2012). However, maturing schoolchildren become less influenced by family and pedagogues (Žukauskienė, 2012). Adolescents gradually progress from union with family to a stronger relations with contemporaries and gain more independence. One of the strongest features is their sociability – endeavours to interact with contemporaries and to be accepted (Myers, 2008).

Researches on factors that determine choosing particular sport discipline and attendance of trainings form favourable background for more effective young athletes' selection and further training process.

**Research object** — socio-environmental factors that have influence on track and field athletes of age 13-17 participation in sport.

**Research aim** - to establish socio-environmental factors influence on track and field athletes of age 13—17 participation in sport.

## Material and methods

**Organization of the research.** 52 athletes (age 13—17) from Klaipėda County had participated in the questionnaire in May—June, 2011. Young adolescents of age 13—17 were selected because of the presumption that athletes in such age reach for higher results and higher performance in sport (Žilinskienė, 2009), i.e. young adolescents begin planning their sports career.

Track and field athletes by their age are divided into cadets (age 13—14) and juniors (age 15—17) (Žilinskienė, 2009). 48.1 % cadets and 51.9 % juniors participated in the survey.

Interview with track and field athletics coaches, who worked in Klaipėda County, was carried out in November, 2011. Eleven coaches were questioned. Each respondent before being questioned was introduced to the goals and the purpose of the study. Given answers were written by hand on separate sheets because coaches did not agree to be recorded. The date and time were settled beforehand by phone.

Coaches with large pedagogical experience (over 20 years) were dominant (63.6%) in the interview. Approximately one-third of respondents (27.3%) had been working as coaches for about 11—20 years.

**Methods.** Methods of scientific-methodical literature analysis, questionnaire, structural interview, and statistical analysis were used in this work.

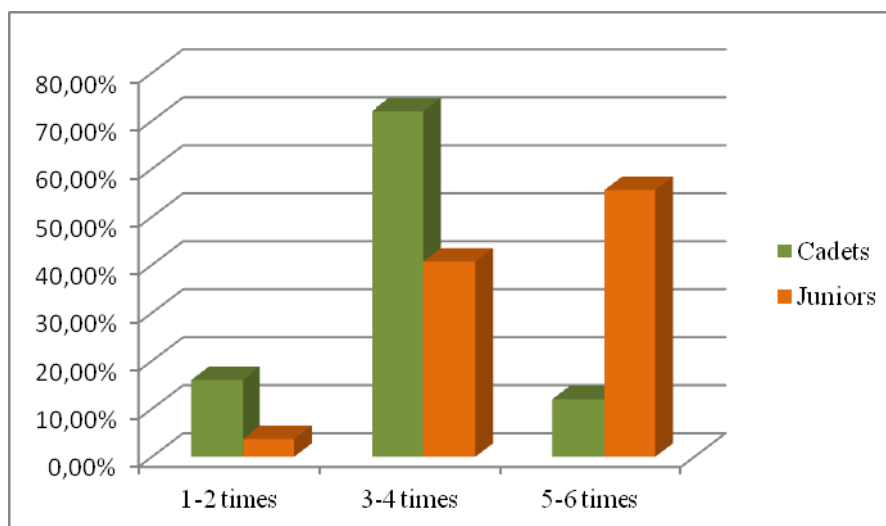
**Questionnaire.** Questionnaire, prepared by N. Žilinskienė (2008) and approbated in the session of Vilnius Pedagogical University Department of Sport Teaching Methods, was applied during the research. The permission of the author was received as well. Questionnaire was formed of 15 questions: 5 open-ended type, 8 closed-ended type, and 2 semi-open type questions.

**Interview** was arranged according to paper analysis of foreign authors (Weiss, 2010; Stuntz, Sayles, 2011 and others). Interview consisted of questions about social factors influence on choosing track and field athletics, the duration of attending trainings, participation in competitions, and on trainings attendance termination.

**Statistical analysis.** Rates (in percentage) and  $\chi^2$  test were calculated. Results were assessed as statistically significant if  $p \leq 0.05$ . Data analysis completed with SPSS Statistics (17) software.

## Results

The research revealed that majority of cadets (72.0%) attended trainings 3—4 times per week and juniors – 5—6 times (55.6%) or 3-4 times per week (40.7%). The difference among groups is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 11.43$ ; df 2;  $p < 0.05$ ) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Percentage dispersion of trainings number per week

More than a half (76.0%) cadets had been attending track and field athletics trainings already for 1—2 years and juniors – for 3—4 years (55.6%).

Consequently, majority of young adolescents started their sport activities when being of age 11–12. It practically fits D. Radžiukynas (2005) recommended age limit for athletes' selection to various track and field athletics disciplines (Žilinskienė, 2009). The rest proportion of juniors (14.8%) and cadets (8.0%) started attending trainings at age 9-10. Difference between these groups is statistically significant ( $\chi^2$  11.46; df 2;  $p < 0.05$ ). Cadets' trainings usually took about 1.5 hr (72.0%), juniors' – for approximately 2 hr (66.7%) ( $\chi^2$  16.31; df 2;  $p < 0.001$ ).

The most important factors that determined cadets to choose track and field athletics were coach invitation (44.5 %), enjoying communication with other athletes and a coach (60.2%), desire for new knowledge and new skills (64.1%), and willingness to enhance self-confidence (48.5%). It needs to be noticed that some aspects did not influence this choice: friends' example (56.3%), parents' suggestion (56.1%), mass media (84.0 %), and doctor advice (100%) (Table 1).

*Table 1. Factors that determined cadets to choose track and field athletics (percentage)*

Factors	Yes	Partly	No
Friends example	24.3	20.1	56.3
Famous athletes example	40.3	16.6	44.7
Physical education teacher recommendation	32.8	24.1	44.6
Coach invitation	44.5	12.5	44.5
Parents suggestion	20.6	24.7	56.1
Mass media influence (press, television)	8.7	8.6	84.7
Influence of sports popularity	20.6	28.4	52.6
Communication with coach and athletes	60.2	28.7	12.5
Willingness to gain knowledge and skills	64.1	20.1	16.2
Medics advice	-	-	100.0
Desire to enhance self-confidence	48.5	40.6	12.6

Juniors had indicated very similar reasons when choosing track and field athletics (Table 2). Majority of juniors, differently from cadets, were encouraged by their physical education teachers (40.7%), not by coaches. Additionally, 11.1% juniors were advised by medics to engage in track and field athletics. This could be related to the presumption that physical education teachers get to know their senior students better or they better, compared to younger pupils, tend to reveal themselves in physical education lessons.

*Table 2. Factors that determined juniors to choose track and field athletics (percentage)*

Factors	Yes	Partly	No
Friends example	7.4	25.9	66.7
Famous athletes example	14.8	18.5	66.7
Physical education teacher recommendation	40.7	29.6	29.6
Coach invitation	33.3	14.8	51.9
Parents suggestion	18.5	29.6	51.9
Mass media influence (press, television)	3.7	3.7	92.6
Influence of sports popularity	7.4	14.8	77.8
Communication with coach and athletes	66.7	22.2	11.1
Willingness to gain knowledge and skills	63.0	29.6	7.4
Medics advice	7.4	3.7	88.9
Desire to enhance self-confidence	51.9	29.6	18.5

Most cadets indicated that they were motivated by such reasons: desire to achieve high sport results (100%), willingness to participate in sport competitions (80.3%), willingness to be healthy and strong (80.1%), and interesting trainings (76.1%) (Table 3).

**Table 3. Factors that motivate cadets to train (percentage)**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Partly</b>	<b>No</b>
Willingness to be famous	40.2	44.3	16.3
Willingness to reach high sport results	100.0	-	-
Willingness to be in a national team	56.6	28.6	16.4
Willingness to be Olympian	52.1	36.5	12.7
Willingness to participate in sport competitions	80.3	16.4	4.5
Willingness to have more friends	40.1	40.4	20.1
Willingness to be healthy and strong	80.1	16.6	4.3
Material well-being	8.9	44.7	48.2
Willingness to have purposeful leisure	56.4	39.9	4.7
Warm and honest relations with a coach	40.2	55.8	4.6
Interesting trainings	76.1	23.9	-

Juniors had indicated factors very similar to cadets': willingness to achieve high sport results (92.6%), willingness to participate in sport competitions (88.9%), and wish to be healthy and strong (81.5%).

Coaches' questionnaire revealed that choosing track and field athletics, attending trainings, and achieving sport results were influenced by complexity of socio-environmental factors.

Six categories were settled after respondents indicated concrete factors when answering the question "What are socio-environmental factors that influence choosing track and field athletics?" (Table 4).

**Table 4. Socio-environmental factors that influence choosing track and field athletics**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Illustrative statements</b>
<b><i>Coach influence (6 informants)</i></b>	„as coach goes to schools and propagates track and field athletics“ (T2; T5); „as coach manages to attract and motivate children to attend trainings“ (T10);
<b><i>Parents recommendation (8 informants)</i></b>	„if parents are motivated for their child to have purposeful leisure, this encourages and stimulates to take track and field athletic trainings“ (T1); „it depends on parents activities in their childhood“ (T11);
<b><i>Friends recommendation (5 informants)</i></b>	„children usually communicate the information to others“ (T1);
<b><i>Sport motives (4 informants)</i></b>	„it is important if a child wants to do any sport“ (T6);
<b><i>Conditions in trainings (2 informants)</i></b>	„good training conditions are also very influential“ (T1); „it depends on training conditions“ (T11);
<b><i>Physical education teacher recommendation (1 informant)</i></b>	„it depends on teachers and how they encourage pupils“ (T6).

When aiming to reveal the differences in track and field athletics choosing reasons by age, we presented the question "Are there any differences in track and field athletics choosing reasons between younger and senior schoolchildren?" More than a half coaches (n=8) observed the difference. Informants indicated that younger athletes primarily wanted to have fun in trainings and to try this sport discipline and senior schoolchildren were motivated to reach high sport results.

Table 5. Respondents' opinion on track and field athletics choosing reasons between cadets and juniors

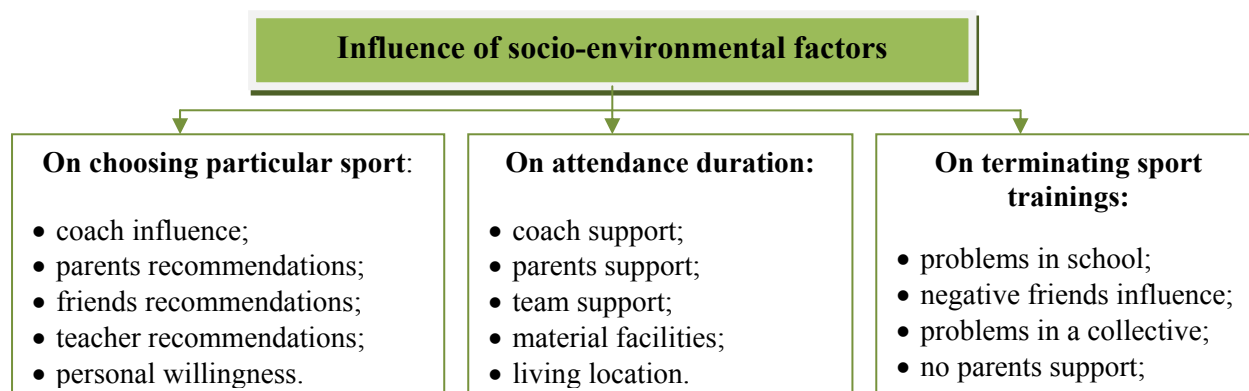
Category		Illustrative statements
There is no difference	no	„Reasons are the same but it is harder to persuade senior schoolchildren“ (T3); „there are no differences among reasons when choosing to do sport“ (T4); „there are no differences“ (T8).
There is difference	is	„The difference is that senior schoolchildren achieve good sport results and in such way they set an example for younger pupils. Then younger ones try harder because they want to be equal“ (T1); „sometimes senior schoolchildren want to start doing sport too late“ (T2); „senior pupils want to reach results and younger – choose it for friends or likable coach“ (T5); „younger athletes are majority in this sport discipline. They want to prove themselves. Seniors choose it when they see perspectives and really want to do this sport“ (T6); „there are differences. Younger pupils come to trainings to play and be with friends. Seniors already have motivation and work much harder“ (T7); „seniors have their own opinion. Minors are attracted by possibilities of having fun during trainings“ (T9); „senior schoolchildren already are motivated because as they attend trainings, their results grow and this encourages them“ (T10); „there are differences. Minors are often invited by friends. Seniors tend to evaluate their possibilities“ (T11).

We gave informants the question “What is the influence of parents, friends, coach, team members’ support, inter-relations, good microclimate, etc. on participation in sport competitions?” Most coaches (n=7) emphasized that “all aspects mentioned in the question are the main factors influencing children to participate in competitions” (T1); “often all these reasons give a support” (T4); “all the factors influence psychological temperature and physical state” (T6); “all the factors are important when seeking emotional stability before the contest” (T7); “all the factors have positive impact on participation in competitions” (T8); “all the factors enforce attempts and labour for results” (T9); “all the factors have positive conditioning” (T11).

According to one respondent, “it is good when parents care about child’s sport activities and give a support before competitions. A lot of gives *the support of group, collective. The influence of coach* is also huge – what support he/she gives” (T3). Other testee accented that “already gained sport results and friends support forms a positive influence” (T5). This “encourages and reinforces self-confidence” (T2). Moreover, very important factor is “decent microclimate among group members and coach’s ability to get in contact with athletes in various situations” (T10). In other words, coaches acknowledge the complex impact of socio-environmental factors on participation in sport competitions.

With reference to answers to the question “What are the common reasons for termination of track and field athletics trainings?” it can be acknowledged that there were no one particular reason indicated. Informants singled out 12 categories of the reasons: failures in sport, problems with progress in school, injuries and other health disorders, unwillingness, negative friends influence, moving out to other city, communicating problems in the group, new needs, etc.

After summarizing received answers, we can formulate the statement that, according to coaches, the most common reasons for terminating track and field athletics trainings were failures in sport, problems with progress in school, injuries and other health disorders, and communicating problems in sport group.



**Figure 2.** Socio-environmental factors influence on choosing track and field athletics, on attendance duration, and on terminating sport trainings

Therefore, coach, parents, friends (team members), school, and teachers are the most important socio-environmental factors that influence choosing track and field athletics, duration of attendance, and terminating sport trainings.

## Discussion

After the research we established that many cadets engage in sport because of their willingness to participate in sport competitions (80.3%) and to reach high sport results (100%). Less than a half of respondents indicated participation in sport trainings because of their attempts to have more friends (40.1%) as well as because of sincere and honest relations to a coach (40.2%).

A. Šarkauskienė, E. Adaškevičienė (2008) had carried out the research where 672 young adolescents participated and established that to engage in sport children were stimulated by motivational factors, i.e. inner motivation – willingness to be strong and healthy (68.3%) and need for self-expression – willingness to employ their abilities (38.4%). Social factors – friends influence (9.0%), personality of a coach and a teacher (8.4%), parents support (6.2%) – seemed of less importance. M. E. Nichol, W. Pickett, and I. Janssen (2009) indicate that major factors that determine schoolchildren participation in sport are such as home-school situation, attitude, and children and parents education. Since a child spends a lot of time in school, educational institutions should significantly influence choosing to be physically active and select particular sport discipline. N. Keresztes et al. (2008) note that among the factors influencing children to engage in sport, the role of parents, peers, and other members of social networks seem to be crucial. Results of the research where 548 adolescents of age 10-15 had participated revealed that, during early adolescence, girls' participation in sport activities was mainly influenced by peers (e.g. friends, classmates, boyfriend/girlfriend).

Juniors, when indicating factors that had influenced them to engage in sport, emphasized the willingness to participate in sport competitions (88.9 %) and to achieve high sport results (92.7 %). They also considered such factor as sincere and honest relation to a coach (70.4%) to be important. Still, coaches used to think that the main factors that determined further young track and field athletes continuation to stay in sport were support of parents, friends, coaches, and team members. W. M. Weiss, M. R Weiss (2010) established that gymnasts (age 8—18) were mostly influenced by pleasure that is experienced when doing sport, by possibilities to take trainings, participate in competitions, individual investments, and parents support. Lesser factors lied in parents, team members, and coaches' restrictions. Such factors as expense, team support, and desirable alternatives were on average importance.

During the interview with coaches, it was established that termination of sport for cadets and juniors had various reasons. The most common reasons were indicated as failures in sport, progress problems in school, traumas and health disorders.

According to S. A. Banning, M. S. Wells, B. L. Baker (2009), approximately 70% schoolchildren by age 13 terminate attending organized sport activities and competitions. In other words, adolescents retire before they reach high sport performance level. This is determined by internal and external factors. External factors are considered to be leaving town and parents job loss. Internal reasons are recognized as “burn-out” of sport, negative experience in sport (for example, traumas), and new interests. But

researches also reveal that mentioned factors can be managed. That is to say, parents and coach's relation to an athlete can influence the decision not to leave sport. T. K. Scanlan et al. (2009) researches show that many athletes (approximately 67%), who like chosen sport discipline, tend to combine life priorities, for example, school and sport. The rest of athletes are forced to focus on one particular priority. Then, or school stays aside, or sport is terminated.

## Conclusions

1. Analysis of survey data revealed that:
  - the most important socio-environmental factor that determined cadets and juniors choice to engage in sports was possibility to communicate with other athletes and coach (cadets – 60.2%; juniors – 66.7%). Almost a half respondents indicated that they had chosen track and field athletics because they had been invited by coach (cadets – 44.5%) or physical education teacher (juniors – 40.7%);
  - socio-environmental factors for young athletes to participate in sport were not of major importance. Significant were goals for self-realization: young athletes attended trainings because they wanted to reach high sport results (100 % cadets; 92.6 % juniors), to participate in sport competitions (80.3% cadets; 88.9% juniors), and to be strong and healthy (80.1% cadets).
2. Coaches' interview revealed that choice of track and field athletics and frequency of participating in trainings were influenced by the whole complex of socio-environmental factors: authority of the coach (regularity, ability to interest), parents' and friends' recommendations, conditions of trainings. Duration of track and field athletics trainings depended on achieved sports results, coach, parents, team (friends) support, material facilities, interesting trainings, etc. These factors were the main in supporting athletes in competitions as well. However, failures in sports, progress problems in school, traumas, problems with team members and coach, lack of parents support and new expectations in sports were leading reasons for terminating sport activity.

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## **SOCIALINĖS APLINKOS VEIKSNIŲ ĮTAKA JAUNŲJŲ LENGVAATLEČIŲ DALYVAVIMUI SPORTINĖJE VEIKLOJE**

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### **S a n t r a u k a**

Lietuvos lengvaatlečių varžybų statistika rodo, kad šiuolaikinė problema yra mažėjantis mokinių, norinčių dalyvauti lengvosios atletikos pratybose ir varžybose, skaičius. Lietuvos (Miškinis, 2002, Žilinskienė ir kt., 2007) ir užsienio šalių mokslininkai (Weiss et al., 2003; 2010; Scanlan et. al., 2003; 2009) pažymi, kad šiai situacijai įtakos gali turėti ne tik individualūs gebėjimai, saviraiškos poreikiai, amžius, bet socialinė aplinka – tėvų pritarimas ir paskatinimas, draugų požiūris, trenerio ir sportininko bei sportininkų tarpasmeniniai santykiai ir pan.

Tyrimo tikslas - nustatyti socialinės aplinkos veiksnių įtaką 13–17 metų lengvaatlečių dalyvavimui sportinėje veikloje.

Tyrimo buvo taikyti mokslinės-metodinės literatūros analizės, anketinės apklausos, struktūrizuoto interviu, statistinės analizės tyrimo metodai. Anketinės apklausos metodu 2011 m. gegužės-birželio mėnesį buvo apklausti 52 lengvaatlečiai (13–17 metų), sportuojantys Klaipėdos apskrityje. 2011 m. lapkričio mėnesį buvo atliktas interviu su 11 Klaipėdos apskrityje dirbančių lengvosios atletikos trenerių.

Anketinės apklausos duomenų analizė atskleidė, kad svarbiausias socialinės aplinkos veiksnys, lėmęs jaunučių ir jaunių lengvosios atletikos pasirinkimą yra galimybė bendrauti su kitais sportuojančiais ir treneriu (jaunučiai - 60,2 proc.; jaunieji - 66,7 proc.). Beveik pusė respondentų nurodė, kad pasirinko lengvąją atletiką, nes pakvietė treneris (jaunučiai - 44,5 proc.) ar rekomendavo kūno kultūros mokytojas (jaunieji - 40,7 proc.).

Jaunųjų lengvaatlečių dalyvavimui sportinėje veikloje socialinės aplinkos veiksniai nėra itin svarbūs. Aktualūs yra savirealizacijos tikslai: jaunieji lengvaatlečiai treniruojausi, nes nori pasiekti gerų sportinių rezultatų (100 proc. jaunučių; 92,6 proc. jaunių), dalyvauti sporto varžybose (80,3 proc. jaunučių; 88,9 proc. jaunių), būti stiprūs ir sveiki (80,1 proc. jaunučių).

Interviu su treneriais atskleidė, kad lengvosios atletikos pasirinkimui bei šios sporto šakos pratybų lankymui įtakos turi visas kompleksas socialinės aplinkos veiksnių: trenerio įtaka (profesionalumas, mokėjimas sudominti), tėvų ir draugų rekomendacijos, treniruočių sąlygos. Lengvosios atletikos lankymo trukmė priklauso nuo pasiektų sportinių rezultatų, trenerio, tėvų, komandos narių (draugų) palaikymo, materialinės bazės, treniruočių įdomumo ir pan. Šie veiksniai yra pagrindiniai ir palaikant mokinius varžybose. Tačiau nesėkmės sporte, pažangumo problemos mokykloje, patirtos traumos, problemos su komandos nariais ir treneriu, tėvų nepalaikymas ir nauji sportavimo poreikiai yra pagrindinės priežastys, lemiančios pasitraukimą iš pasirinktos sporto šakos.

**RAKTINIAI ŽODŽIAI:** socialinės aplinkos veiksniai, jaunieji lengvaatlečiai, sportinė veikla.